THE MARCH OF WAR

THE MEDITERRANEAN FRONT

(November 16, 1943, to January 15, 1944)

AROUND the middle of November, when the Allies in Italy had reached the front indicated on our map with shaded lines, they stopped for a breather. Preparations for another offensive could be observed; and in a message to his troops General Montgomery, the Commander of the British Eighth Army, declared that the time had come to throw the Germans back to a line north of Rome.

On November 29 the Eighth Army launched its offensive with its right wing—consisting mainly of Indian and New Zealand formations—along the Adriatic. The attackers crossed the lower Sangro on a 30-kilometer front but progressed very slowly, not yet having advanced across the Foro River by January 15. During this time, the Eighth Army's left wing in the mountainous interior did not move at all.

General Clark's US Fifth Army began large-scale operations a week later, with the objective of gaining access to the Cassino plain running along the upper Garigliano and the Sacco Rivers almost to Rome. The focal points of the attack were on both sides of the Mignano/Cassino road. The American advance was so slow that for weeks and even months the same names appeared in the communiqués. As we go to press, Cassino is still in German hands, but its fall must be reckoned with in view of the vast numerical superiority of the Americans.

The advance of the US Fifth Army dwindled from 65 kilometers in September to 15 kilometers in December. Of the 18 kilometers which separate Cassino from Venafro, the Americans advanced about 10 kilometers within the 10 weeks up to the middle of January. Should Cassino be captured, a quicker advance may be expected, as fighting would then shift to a wide plain favoring the mass of equipment used by the Americans. The British Eighth Army, which had at first met only with weak German rearguards or no resistance at all, saw its progress retarded in October to 25 kilometers and in December to 15 kilometers. In view of the powerful resistance offered by the handful of German divisions in the mountainous terrain of southern Italy and the high losses being inflicted on the Allies there, Allied landings on the Italian coast further to the north were generally expected. Up to the middle of January, however, none had occurred.

At the end of 1943 there was a reshuffle in the Allied command. General Eisenhower, Commander in Chief in the Mediterranean, was put in charge of the planned invasion of western Europe. His place was taken by General Maitland Wilson. General Bernard Montgomery, who was placed in command of the British forces to invade Europe from the west, was succeeded in Italy by General Leese. General Harold Alexander was made Commander in Chief of the Allied forces in Italy.

In the Aegean Sea where, following upon Badoglio's treason, the Allies had temporarily occupied a great many islands of strategic importance, they were unable to retain a single foothold. This reflects a certain weakness in the Mediterranean, probably due to the urgent Anglo-American need for warships in other theaters of war, including the Pacific. The German defense of Italy is also tying down a large number of supply ships and naval escorts, all the more so since both the American and British commanders prefer to play safe by amassing a huge superiority in troops and arms before attacking. With the capitulation on November 22 of the island of Samos, off the Turkish coast of Asia Minor, the entire Aegean was once again safely under German control.